GORGEOUS CARAT

3

YOU HIGURI

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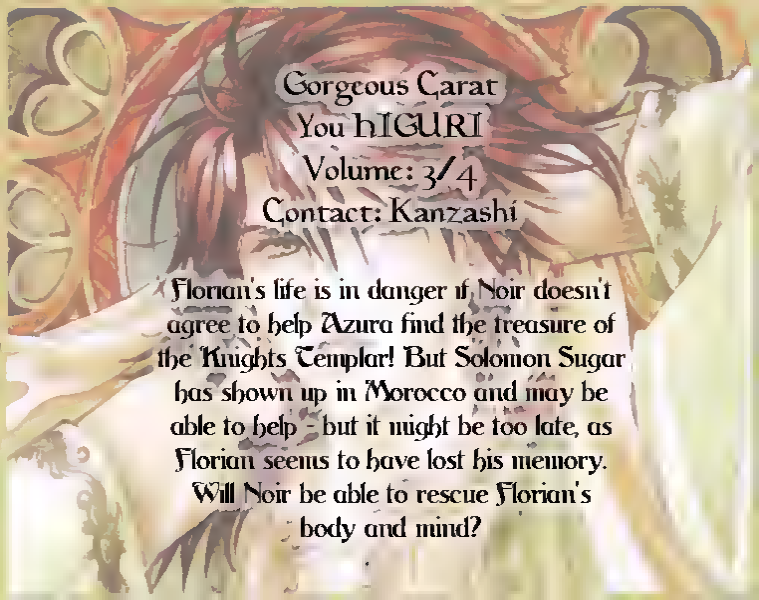

Gorgeous Carat
You hIGURI
Volume: 3/4
Contact: Kanzashi
Florian's life is in danger if Noir doesn't agree to help Azura find the treasure of the Knights Templar! But Solomon Sugar has shown up in Morocco and may be able to help - but it might be too late, as Florian seems to have lost his memory. Will Noir be able to rescue Florian's body and mind?

YOU HIGURI

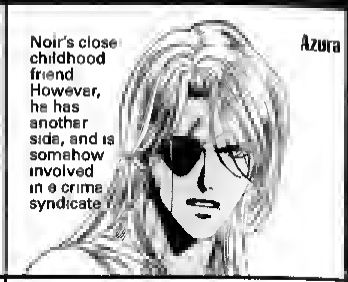
GORGEOUS CARAT

VIRTUE OF DARKNESS

3

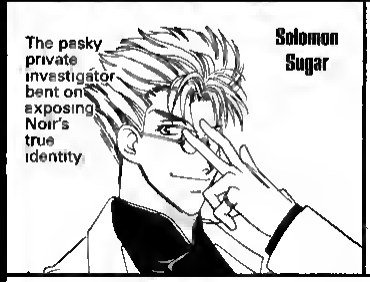
Noel

A sweet young boy who Florian takes under his wing after a run-in with the Black Hand



Azura

Noir's close childhood friend However, he has another side, and is somehow involved in a crime syndicate



Solomon Sugar

The pesky private investigator bent on exposing Noir's true identity

Laila

Noir's right-hand women who adores him

Our story so far...

As Phantom Thief Noir continues to cause trouble for the city of Peris, he suddenly receives an invitation from his long-lost childhood friend, Azura, to come to Morocco. Noir has been disguising himself as a sharp loan sherk, but Azura knows his true identity and asks him to crack the mystery of the treasure of the Knights Templer.

One night, Florian has the misfortunate of accidentally eavesdropping on an argument gone bad between Azura and the female boss of the crime syndicate branch of Paris. Having discovered that Azura is lying to Noir, Florian is forced to smoke opium, or risk putting his friends in danger.

It is only after noticing Florian's odd behavior in the following days that Noir finally realizes his once most-trusted friend, Azura, has betrayed him. However, it's too late, as Florian, now hooked on opium, escapes from the mansion, and Noir is taken captive and at the mercy of Azura's whip.

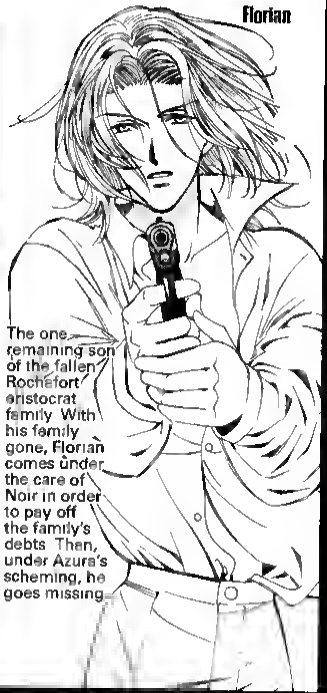
Phantom Thief Noir A.K.A. Ray Balzac Courland

The oh-so cool phantom thief that all of Paris is talking about. He now searches for the lost treasure of the Knights Templar as a favor to Azura.

GORGEOUS CARAT

Virtue of Darkness

Character Introductions



Florian

The one remaining son of the fallen Rochefort aristocrat family. With his family gone, Florian comes under the care of Noir in order to pay off the family's debts. Then, under Azura's scheming, he goes missing.

GORGEOUS CARAT
Virtue of Darkness

3

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RAY.
OR SHOULD I SAY... PHANTOM THIEF NOIR?
I REALLY DIDN'T WANT IT TO COME TO THIS.
BUT SEEING HOW STUBBORN YOU ARE, I HAVE NO CHOICE.
I WAS A FOOL TO TRUST YOU!
THERE'S NO WAY I'LL HELP YOU ANYMORE! YOU CAN TRY CRACKING THE CODE YOURSELF!
!
IS THAT SO?
YOU DIDN'T COME ALL THE WAY FROM PARIS TO REFUSE ME.
IN OUR CHILDHOOD DAYS...
...WE WERE POOR, AND EVERYONE WAS OUR ENEMY...
I BELIEVED THERE WAS A BOND BETWEEN US, STRONGER THAN BROTHERS.
. . . .
YOU WERE VERY SPECIAL TO ME.
THAT'S WHY...
...I THOUGHT I'D BE WILLING TO DO ANYTHING FOR YOU.

AZURA!
HE WAS QUITE A GOOD PLAYTHING.
PERHAPS I SHOULD'VE LET YOU JOIN IN ON OUR FUN.
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU HAVEN'T WALKED DOWN THAT PATH BEFORE.
HE'S THAT...
...PRECIOUS TO YOU?
YOU'RE TOO LATE, HOWEVER.
HE SHOULD BE GROWING COLD IN A DITCH SOMEWHERE, THANKS TO ONE OF MY ASSASSINS.
EITHER WAY, HE WAS ALREADY AN OPIUM ADDICT.

...THAT I COULD TRUST.
AZURA!
BUT...
...YOU BETRAYED ME!
AND YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE!
WE WERE A FAMILY. ONE THAT PROTECTED EACH OTHER FROM ANYTHING.
I SWEAR
...IF YOU'VE DONE ANYTHING TO HURT HIM, YOU WON'T GET AWAY WITH IT!
AND ABOVE THAT
WHAT YOU DID TO FLORIAN

THAT'S A FINE LOOK IN YOUR EYES, RAY.
HAVE YOU FIGURED IT OUT YET?
ARGH!
FRIENDSHIP AND TRUST AREN'T ENOUGH TO GET BY IN THIS WORLD
THAT'S WHAT HAS GOTTEN YOU INTO THIS MESS.
I TEAR DOWN THOSE WHOM I WISH TO USE!
LET THIS BE THE LAST LESSON...
...I TEACH YOU!

PERHAPS THAT'S WHY...
I WANTED TO STEAL HIM AWAY FROM YOU SO BADLY.
YOU SURPRISE ME, RAY. I DIDN'T YOU THINK YOU WERE THE TYPE TO GET SO INVOLVED WITH A MERE STRANGER.
I SWEAR I'LL KILL YOU ONE DAY.
...AZURA
I SWEAR IT!

RAY.
THAT'S UP TO YOU.
WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO TO THEM?!
YOU'VE BEEN PLANNING THIS FROM THE START, HAVEN'T YOU?!
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
WHAT—?
IF YOU DO, I PROMISE TO ALLOW YOUR FRIENDS TO RETURN SAFELY TO PARIS.
I NEED YOUR POWER.
TELL ME THAT YOU WILL BE MINE
...CONSIDER THE PAIN THAT WILL BEFALL YOUR PRECIOUS FRIENDS.
...YOU MUST HELP ME. IF NOT...
NOW..
THIS IS REALITY.
ERGH
PHANTOM THIEF NOIR
YOU WERE THE GREAT ELUSIVE ROBBER WHO HAD THE CITY OF PARIS DANCING IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.
BUT BEFORE ME, YOU HANG LIKE A PATHETIC, BROKEN DOLL.
YOU'VE GROWN. MAYBE EVEN EXCEEDED ME IN SOME AREAS

NOIR
LAILA!
NOEL!
I CAN'T FIND THEM ANYWHERE! NO
ARE YOU WITH NOIR AND FLORIAN?
AND I LOOKED EVERYWHERE I COULD!
THEY DIDN'T CATCH YOU?!
NOEL, YOU CLEVER RASCAL, YOU!
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS!
WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON HERE?

AZURA ...!
WE DON'T WANT ANY SENSELESS BLOODSHED, DO WE?
I DON'T HAVE THAT KIND OF TIME TO WASTE, ANYWAY.
COME ON! LET US OUTTA HERE!
AW, MAN. I'M STARVING!

IF THE BOSS WERE STILL OKAY, YOU CAN BET WE WOULDN'T BE KILLING TIME IN THIS PLACE.
FOR ALL WE KNOW, HE COULD ALREADY BE DE--
YOU REALLY THINK HE'S COMING BACK?
AND JUST WHAT DO YOU MEAN...
...BY THAT?
OH NO, I'M STARTING TO LOSE IT!
NOIR, WHERE COULD YOU BE?!
DON'T SAY THAT...
WHEN YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW!
JUST WHERE...
...ARE YOU?

NOEL?!
DON'T MAKE FUN OF ME!
I'M STILL ONE OF NOIR'S MEN!
OH, GREAT! WHAT GOOD IS A LITTLE RUNT LIKE HIM GOING TO DO?
WE'RE DOOMED!
I'LL SHOW YOU THAT I CAN HELP, EVEN IF I AM SMALL!
JUST WAIT THERE!
YOU HAVE TO HIDE SOMEWHERE UNTIL NOIR COMES BACK!
NOEL!
NOEL, NO!
DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPID!

SO FAR, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ONE STEP BEHIND THEM. BUT, THIS TIME IT'S DIFFERENT
THE FORMER CAPITAL OF MOROCCO, FEZ.
THE FEMALE BOSS OF THE BLACK HAND, LOUISE MASTROIANNI.
ACCORDING TO A RELIABLE BIT OF INFORMATION, SHE APPARENTLY RAN AWAY TO HERE AFTER HAVING BROKEN OUT OF THE PARIS PRISON. THAT'S AS FAR AS WE KNOW.
BROTHER!
BROTHER!
I FEEL LIKE I'M GETTING CLOSE TO THE HEART OF THINGS...

WHY, THANK YOU.
SIR, LET ME CARRY YOUR LUGGAGE TO THE CARRIAGE.
WHAT THE --?
I DIDN'T MEAN YOUR CARRIAGE!
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!
THIEF!
I gotta keep my guard up from now on!

AFTER HAVING COME THIS FAR, IT SHOULD BE EASY TO FIND A LEAD.
NO DOUBT, A CAUCASIAN WOMAN WOULD STAND OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB AROUND HERE.
I PROMISE I'LL GET YOUR REVENGE.

BUT, JUST YOU WAIT. BEFORE LONG, I'LL FINALLY EXPOSE THE CRIME SYNDICATE THAT KILLED YOU.

SOLOMON SUGAR?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!
OOPS
ONE OF A DETECTIVES TRUSTED WEAPONS: WIRE.
TA DA!
IF WE DON'T HURRY, YOU'LL BE CAPTURED AGAIN.
I'LL EXPLAIN LATER.
IT'S ALL THANKS TO THIS LITTLE KID HERE.

SOMETHING SMELLS FUNNY HERE.
...
FRIEND HUH?
I DON'T REALLY KNOW.
NO!--
Oops!
I MEAN, THEY SAID HE'S A FRIEND OF RAY'S
THERE'S A DOOR AT THE BOTTOM OF THESE STAIRS.
Oh!

OH, LAILA! I JUST REMEMBERED!
HE MIGHT BE... THERE.
LAILA!
DEEP IN THE MANSION'S GROUNDS
I SAW A LITTLE ROOF OUT THERE, LIKE A SHED.
THERE WERE TOO MANY TREES...
SO I WASN'T ABLE TO GET CLOSE TO IT
THAT MEANS IT HAS TO BE THE ONLY PLACE...
...I HAVEN'T CHECKED YET!
BECAUSE I'M...
...ONE OF HIS FOLLOWERS!

ALL RIGHT, LAILA, KID.
OU'RE THE ST TO GO.
I DON'T SEE ANY GUARDS. THE COAST IS CLEAR.
WE'LL SNEAK OFF ONE AT A TIME.
I KNOW... RAY IS BEING HELD CAPTIVE SOMEWHERE INSIDE THIS MANSION!
CAN'T JUST EAVE HIM EHIND!
NO.
I'M STAYING HERE!

IN EITHER CASE, I BETTER TAKE A LOOK INTO THIS "AZURA" FELLOW.
THIS IS MY BELOVED BLACK KITTY WE'RE DEALING WITH HERE
AND I'M NOT ABOUT TO HAND HIM OVER TO SOME GUY I DON'T KNOW!
GO FIND A SAFE PLACE TO HIDE AND WAIT THERE
I'LL GO
BUT ...!
JINGLE

WILL YOU SHOW ME THE WAY?
NOEL ?
S-
SURE!
HEY !
WAIT !
...
THEY'RE HOPELESS.
WE'LL GO, TOO!
QUIET !
DO YOU WANT TO BE THROWN BACK INTO THAT CELL AGAIN?

...
WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO...
...NOIR?

GOD-DAMN IT
I could sure go for a cigar right about now
IF I HAD TO SAY WHICH I PREFERRED
...I LIKE BEING THE ONE IN CONTROL.
JEEZ, HE REALLY DID A NUMBER ON ME.
OUCH ...
SO HE EXPECTS ME...
...TO SELL HIM MY SOUL?

YOU CAN DO WHATEVER THE HELL YOU LIKE WITH ME
I BELONG TO YOU
JUST DON'T LAY A HAND ON THE OTHERS!
PROMISE ME!
OW OW OW!
JEEZ, NO NEED TO JUMP ME SO SUDDENLY!
H-HUH?
WHAT ARE YOU --
I PROMISED I'D PROTECT THOSE BEAUTIFUL AMETHYSTS.
CREAK
BUT I COULDN'T EVEN PROTECT ONE PERSON.
AZURA, YOU'RE BACK
IS THAT YOU, THERE?
I GET IT NOW.
YOU WIN. I LOSE.
WHAT POINT IS THERE LEFT IN FIGHTING FOR MY PRIDE?
HA.
HA HA HA!
I DON'T EVEN ...
...NEED TO THINK ABOUT IT.

I UNDERSTAND IT'S AN EMOTIONAL REUNION AND ALL, BUT COULD WE HURRY IT UP A BIT?
WELL IF THOSE AREN'T THE MOST TOUCHING WORDS I'VE HEARD ALL MORNING.
OH, THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE ALL RIGHT!
That smarts, dammit!
Ugh
SOLOMON ?!
I WOULDN'T EXACTLY SAY "ALL RIGHT."
DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE COME ALL THE WAY TO MOROCCO JUST TO HUNT ME DOWN, HAVE YOU?
SORRY TO DISAPPOINT, BUT THIS TIME I'M HERE ON A DIFFERENT CASE
IS THAT WHAT YOU WERE HOPING TO HEAR?
IN YOUR DREAMS
Now turn your head to the side.

NOIR !
breasts
AZU --
?!
LA--
LAILA!
UH, SO THAT DARK AND SHADOWY FIGURE.. WAS YOU?
Talk about embarrassing
YOU'RE REALLY THE BEST BOSS A WOMAN COULD HAVE!
YOU'RE THE ONLY PERSON I'D EVER GIVE MY LIFE FOR.

AZURA!
SO THIS IS AZURA?
FLORIAN IS...
I WAS CERTAIN WE'D FIND YOU TWO TOGETHER
SPEAKING OF WHICH
WHAT HAPPENED TO FLORIAN?
BY THE WAY, YOU'VE TAKEN QUITE A BEATING. SURE YOU CAN WALK?
YEAH... I'LL MANAGE...
TSK, TSK JUST WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING AT A TIME LIKE THIS?

I'LL AIM FOR YOUR HEAD JUST TO BE SURE.
THE NEXT ONE WON'T MISS.
NO!
STAY BACK, LAILA! SOLOMON, HOLD HER!
I'M THE ONE HE WANTS!
!
ERGH!
IF YOU REALLY CAN'T STAND BEING BY MY SIDE SO MUCH..
...THEN I'M LEFT WITH NO CHOICE.
THAT BLUE EYE AND SILVER HAIR IT'S LIKE THEY'RE DRAWING ME RIGHT IN!
BANG
YOU'RE BETTER OFF IN THE SAME PLACE AS YOUR PRECIOUS AMETHYST

ARGH!
HEW
WHAT THE--?!
NOW, RAY! RUN!

BOOM!!
IT'S A PITY THINGS TURNED OUT THIS WAY.
- RAY

SERVES THAT HA
MONEY-HOG
RIGHT! IT'S
WHAT HE GETS
FOR BEING A
TYRANT!
BURN!
BURN!
RAY
...
...WAS
THIS
YOUR
DOING?
NOPE.
AS IF I
HAD THE
TIME.

!
HE'S
GOT A
FEVER
!
HANG IN
THERE,
RAY!
THAT
EXPLOSION
WAS SET
OFF BY
GUNPOWDER
...
IT WAS
NO...
ACCIDENT
...
THEN
THE ACCI-
DENT WAS
JUST A
COINCI-
DENCE
!
TALK
ABOUT
LUCKY!

RUMBLE
RUMBLE
WHAT ON
EARTH IS
HAPPENING
?!

THE
MANSION'S
BURNING
DOWN!
WHAT
THE--?!
WHAT
WAS THAT
EXPLOSION
?!
OH, NO!!
AZURA'S
ANSION IS
A SEA OF
LAMES!

LORD AZURA!
THIS PLACE WILL COME DOWN ANY MOMENT! WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE!
LAILA, NOEL.
HELP ME GET HIM ONTO MY BACK.
SOLOMON!
HE'S PASSED OUT...
IT'S PROBABLY FOR THE BEST.
I'M ALREADY INVOLVED IN THIS DEEP ENOUGH.
CAN'T BACK OUT NOW.

ARE YOU THE ONE...
WHO BURNED DOWN MY FINE MANSION ?
I'D RATHER SEE IT BURNED INTO ASHES THAN FALL INTO YOUR HANDS.
THAT PARCHMENT WAS NOT TO BE TOUCHED BY ANYONE OUTSIDE OF THE CLAN!
AND A CORRUPT MAN LIKE YOURSELF, WITH NO FEAR FOR THE ALMIGHTY GOD, HAS NO RIGHT TO TOUCH THE TREASURE WRITTEN IN IT.
HA... HA HA HA HA.
SCOUNDREL! HE MUST BE ONE OF THOSE BASTARDS WHO'VE BEEN HARASSING LORD AZURA!

WHO ARE YOU?!
DEATH TO THOSE WHO TRY TO TAMPER WITH THE TREASURE!
ARRGH!

AMEN.
SO, YOU MUST BE ONE OF THE DESCENDENTS OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR.
PRE-CISELY.
AND IT'S MY DUTY...
...TO PROTECT THE TREASURE FROM WORTHLESS SCUM LIKE--
HIEHI HIEHI HIEHI
A BLUE... DEVIL.
THANKS TO YOU...
...I ONLY HAVE A GREATER NEED FOR RAY.

HE LOOKS LIKE AN ANGEL...
STR-AIGHT OUT OF A EURO-PEAN PAINT-ING!
♡
OH!
HE'S A WEST-ERNER, THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE WHITE ANTS THAT DEVOUR OUR LAND
TWITCH
HMPH
HE'S NO ANGEL.

HEY, WHAT ARE YOU RASCALS DOING, PEEKING INTO A MAN'S HOUSE?
YOU LITTLE WHIP-PER-SNAP-PERS!
STARE
STUPID OLD GRAND-PA!
H NO, ANDPA AAC'S NGRY NOW!
SHEESH
SEE, THIS IS WHY I TOLD YOU I WAS AGAINST IT. I SWEAR, YOUR CURIOSITY WILL BE THE END OF ME!
BUT, GRAND-PA
...I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A PRETTY MAN BEFORE!

JUST WHAT OF SORT OF SITU-ATION...
DID A WHITE MAN LIKE YOURSELF GET INTO?
HUH?
DON'T GET UP TOO FAST NOW.
THE STAB WOUND WASN'T TOO DEEP, BUT YOUR BODY'S COVERED WITH BRUISES.
URGH
AHH...
WHAT... SORT OF...
SITU-ATION?
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
?!

...!
GRAND-PA!
HE'S COMING TO!
...
HMM?
HUH ...?

WHO ...
... AM I?
?!
I...
UH...
I DON'T... KNOW.
I DON'T ...
... REMEMBER ANYTHING.

YOU WON'T THROW HIM OUT INTO THE STREETS, WILL YOU?
HE'LL DIE IF WE LEAVE HIM ALONE!
THIS IS WHY IT'S NEVER A GOOD IDEA TO MIX YOURSELF UP WITH WHITE PEOPLE.
YOU SHOULD'VE JUST LEFT HIM WHERE YOU FOUND HIM.
GRANDPA!
AT LEAST WAIT UNTIL HIS WOUNDS HAVE HEALED!
PLEASE, GRANDPA!
...
WE'RE ALREADY INVOLVED
GUESS THERE'S NO CHOICE
shaw

...AM I?
JUST WHO...
!
I CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING.
I CAN'T!

BUT HE CHANGED ONCE HE CAME BACK FROM AMERICA.
IT'S ALL AMERICA'S FAULT!
GRANDPA, COME QUICK!
GRANDPA!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
FATIMA, GET BACK!
YOU TWO, HOLD HIM DOWN!
H-HE JUST STARTED --!
UGH!
AH!
SURE
AUGH!
NO! LET GO!
QUIT TRUGGLING!

FATHER ISAAC! IT'S AN EMERGENCY!
AZURA'S MANSION IS BURNING!
WHAT?!
GUESS HE GOT WHAT WAS COMING TO HIM
HE WAS THE ONE ALLOWING THE WHITE FOLK TO TRAMPLE OUR LAND.
EVEN THOUGH HE WAS HALF MOROCCAN HIMSELF!
BACK WHEN HE WAS A KID...
...HE WAS SCARED AND HID A GOOD HEAD ON HIS SHOULDERS

PHEW
WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO HIM?
.....
AH... AH...
MOST LIKELY, HE'S A SPOILED SON OF A RICH MAN.
HE'S MUST'VE GOTTEN HIS HANDS ON SOME OPIUM OR SOMETHING.
HE'S SUFFERING FROM MILD WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS
IT'S NOTHING SHORT OF WHAT HE DESERVES
OH NO...
DON'T WORRY HE'LL GET OVER THE WORST OF IT IN NO TIME
HE WAS ONLY IN THE EARLY STAGES OF ADDICTION
OH, GRANDPA!

YOWCH!
ERGH!
MMPH!
HE'S A MADMAN!
DAMMIT, I CAN'T GET A HOLD OF THIS GUY!
KID, GET ME A ROPE OR SOMETHING TO TIE HIM WITH!
NO! STOP IT!
DON'T TOUCH ME!
MMPH,
MMPH

SOMEONE PLEASE...
HE'S TEARING ME APART!
THAT BLUE.. BLUE EYE!
NO! I'M SCARED!
AAH!

I DON'T CARE WHAT ANYONE SAYS, ISAAC'S A GOOD MAN.
RIGHT
HUH ?
AFTER LOOKING AFTER ALL THOSE STREET KIDS YEARS BACK, HE'S JUST GROWN STUBBORN.
JUST LIKE THAT AZURA FROM THE MANSION
AFTER HE DID SO MUCH TO HELP HIM
TALK ABOUT BITING THE HAND THAT FEEDS.
AZU... RA?
...VISION ?
AZURA...?
WHAT IS THAT?
WHAT IS THIS

BUT TELL ME... WHO YOU ARE?
HE FEELS SO FAR AWAY...
I CAN'T... REACH HIM.
...FROM WHERE I AM!
ALLAH AKBAR!
AZAAN HAYYA

HA!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING? SNAP OUT OF IT, YOU AIRBRAIN!
SOMEBODY...
NOW COME BACK HERE, YOU DUMMY HEAD.
YOU...
...ARE MY AMETHYST, UNDERSTAND?
A BRATTY GUY, EVEN THOUGH... HE WAS YOUNGER THAN ME.
THAT'S RIGHT.. THERE WAS SOMEONE WHO SPOKE THAT WAY TO ME.

Ah, at long last a cigar
JUST AS A HEADS UP, I'M SURE IT'S NOT ME THEY'RE CHECKING OUT.
WE'D BE TRACKED DOWN IN NO TIME IF WE CHOSE A WESTERN-ORIENTED HOTEL
WHICH IS WHY I CHOSE THIS LITTLE INN BUT IT SEEMS TO BE HAVING THE OPPOSITE EFFECT.
DAMN CHAIN SMOKER
CIGARS AREN'T GOOD FOR YOUR WOUNDS
OH MY!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. IT'S HARDLY COSTING ME A THING.
I SWEAR TO PAY YOU BACK ONCE WE GET BACK TO FRANCE
ESPECIALLY SINCE I LEFT EVERYTHING I HAD IN AZURA'S MANSION
I REALLY OWE YOU ONE FOR THIS

HEY, THIS AIN'T A SHOW!
NOW, SCRAM!
UH, SOLOMON?
WOULDN'T YOU SAY WE'RE ATTRACTING TOO MUCH ATTENTION?
...

I ALMOST FORGOT THIS GUY'S A PART OF AN ARISTOCRATIC FAMILY.
BUT AREN'T YOU ACTING A LITTLE TOO RELAXED?
THEY SEEMED LIKE THE TYPES TO GO AFTER YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY.
I DIDN'T WANT TO BRING IT UP, BUT THE FAMILY CREST OF THE COURLAND FAMILY WAS ON THAT RING.
AND I KNOW FOR A FACT THAT MY COUSIN'S SHIP, WHO WORKS IN THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY, IS DOCKED AT TANGIER.
I WROTE HIM ASKING IF WE COULD HITCH A RIDE ON HIS SHIP.
THAT RING ALONE WAS ENOUGH TO COVER THREE ROUND TRIPS.
AZURA'S HUNTING ME DOWN.
HIS POWER'S NOTHING TO LAUGH AT. I KNOW THAT I CAN'T LET MY GUARD DOWN FOR THIS ONE
I INSIST. I DON'T LIKE THE THOUGHT OF OWING YOU SOMETHING.
IN THAT CASE, HOW 'BOUT YOU TELL ME YOUR TRUE IDENTITY AND WE CALL IT ♡ EVEN?
EXCUSE ME?
You're so fun.
And get off a me!
UPH,
SHEESH,
.. WHERE DID AILA AND NOEL RUN OFF TO? I HAVEN'T SEEN THEM AROUND.
HEY, YOU DON'T HAVE IT.
OH! YOUR RING!
HUH?
HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO TRANSPORT THEM ALL WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY?
THOSE TWO SHOULD BE MEETING UP WITH THE REST OF THE GANG RIGHT ABOUT NOW.
THEY SAID THEY'D BE LEAVING THE COUNTRY AHEAD OF US

...
YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS
...
THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.
I FORGOT.
I HEARD THAT HE WAS YOUR FRIEND.
JUST WHAT HAPPENED?
I CAN'T LET ANY MORE OF MY MEN GET INVOLVED IN THIS.
SEE? WHAT DID I JUST SAY?
I WOULDN'T EXPECT YOU TO BE ABLE TO STAND AFTER THE TORTURE YOU UNDERWENT.
UGH!
OOH!
!
HOLD IT!
IF YOU MOVE AROUND SO MUCH, YOUR WOUNDS WILL REOPEN! WAIT!
DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE PLANNING TO TAKE DOWN AZURA EVEN IF IT COSTS YOU YOUR LIFE.
I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU A LONG TIME.
CALL IT A DETECTIVE'S HUNCH.
DOES IT HAVE SOME CONNECTION TO FLORIAN'S DISAPPEARANCE?
IT'S ALMOST LIKE YOU'RE TRYING NOT TO LET ME NOTICE, BUT YOU'RE NOT PERFECT, RAY.

COME ON.
...
HE'S ...
... DEAD.
WHAT?
FLORIAN'S
...DEAD.
AND...
...IT'S ALL MY FAULT.
...!
IT... CAN'T BE TRUE.

...I STILL COULDN'T LET THE FEELING GO?
WHY IS IT AFTER ALL THIS TIME...
IT'S ALL... MY FAULT!
BECAUSE OF MY WEAKNESS, FLORIAN DIED!
DAMN IT!
I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!

DON'T HURT YOURSELF
...LIKE THIS, ALONE
I THOUGHT YOU WERE ALREADY SUPPOSED TO HAVE LEFT WITH THE OTHERS.
LAILA ...?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I SECRETLY CAME BACK.
I COULDN'T STAND THE THOUGHT OF LEAVING YOU.
I HEARD
WHAT HAPPENED TO FLORIAN
I THOUGHT YOU AND I WERE PARTNERS!
NO MATTER WHAT, I ALWAYS WANT TO BE WITH YOU! I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS!
EVEN IF IT MEANT DYING, AS LONG AS YOU'D THINK OF ME THE SAME WAY AS FLORIAN!
PLEASE ... NDIR.

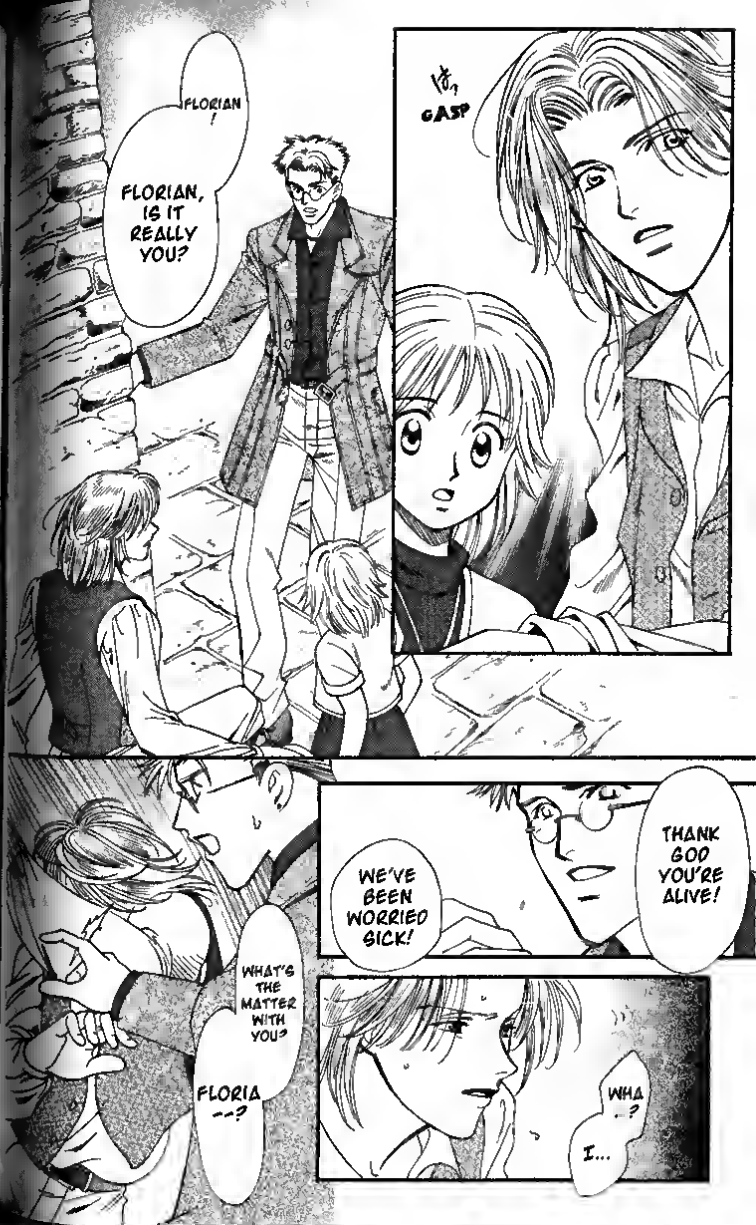
...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING? HURRY IT UP.
...!
HE'S GOING TO HIT ME!
OH!
I'M NOT GOING TO LET ANYONE ELSE DIE.

NO CAN DO
ANY MORE AND WE MIGHT BE KILLED!
SORRY, MISTER
I KNEW HE HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE BLACK HAND!
COULD YOU TELL ME ANYTHING MORE ABOUT IT?
POWERFUL ORGAN-IZATION
I EVEN HEARD SOME MEN HAVE BEEN KILLED
EITHER WAY, IT SEEMS HE'S A GOT A POWERFUL ORGANIZATION BACKING HIM UP.
HEARD HE WAS DOING SOME OVERSEAS TRADING BUT NOTHING HONEST
HE TAKES GOODS FROM HERE AND SELLS THEM FOR TEN TIMES THEIR ORIGINAL PRICE
AND ANY WHO SPEAK UP AGAINST HIM SUDDENLY LOSE BUSINESS, SO IT'S NOT UNLIKELY HE HAS PEOPLE PULLING STRINGS BEHIND THE SCENES
BUT STILL
...WHAT IS THIS DREAD I FEEL?

BUT HOW COULD I FORGET SUCH A UNIQUE FACE?
THAT FACE
I KNOW... I'VE SEEN IT SOMEWHERE BEFORE!
AZURA?
YOU MEAN THE ONE-EYED ONE?

HERE.
THIS MARBLE MUST BE YOURS, LITTLE MISSY.
OH!
TH-THANK YOU!
SHEESH
I DIDN'T THINK I WAS THAT SCARY
AM-ETHYST
TWITCH!
AM ETHYST
NOW WHERE WERE WE?
OH, RIGHT! I WAS SHOWING YOU MY MARBLES!
FLORIAN ?!
I MUST BE SEEING THINGS! HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD!
HE LOOKS THE SPITTING IMAGE OF HIM!
H--
EY !

IT'S LIKE...HE DOESN'T KNOW ME
YOU STAY AWAY FROM HIM!
GO AWAY!
CAN'T YOU SEE AMETHYST DOESN'T LIKE YOU?
H-HEY! WAIT!
AH...!
AH...!
WHAT ON EARTH'S GOTTEN INTO YOU?
IS HE NOT FLORIAN?


FLORIAN!
FLORIAN, IS IT REALLY YOU?
GASP
THANK GOD YOU'RE ALIVE!
WE'VE BEEN WORRIED SICK!
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?
FLORIA--?
WHA...?
I...

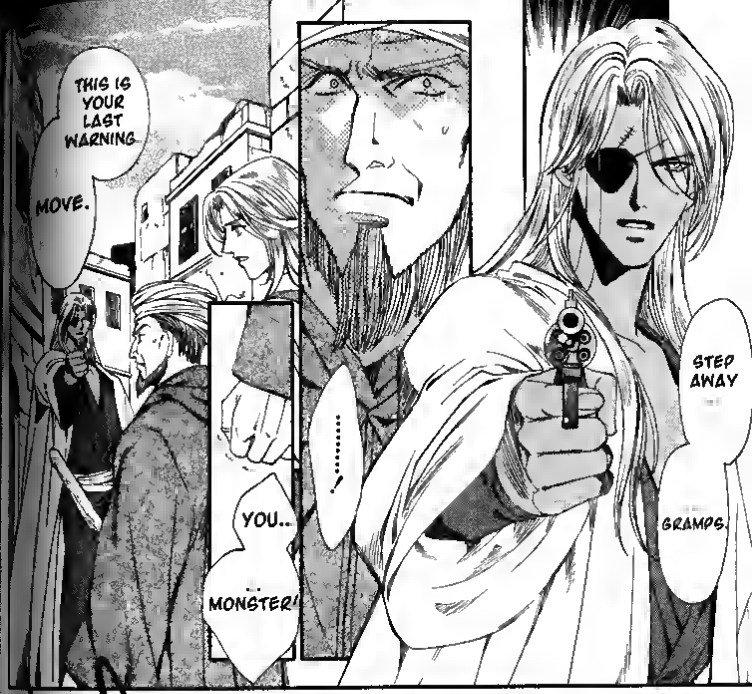
PANT
PANT

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.
WHAT ARE YOU STILL DOING ALIVE?
?!
...
AH...
BUT, I I COULD'VE SWORN I--
SO YOU DIDN'T FINISH HIM OFF?
I HAVE NO NEED ... FOR INCOM-PE-TENTS
...!
U-UH...

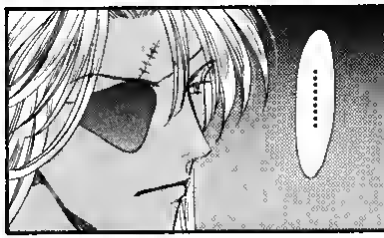
JUST WHY ...
...DID YOU TURN OUT THIS WAY?
THAT'S QUITE A BIG MOUTH YOU'VE GOT THERE, AZURA.
DON'T ..GET IN MY WAY, OLD MAN
AND SO WHAT IF I GET IN THE WAY, HM?
WOULD YOU REALLY KILL THE MAN THAT FED AND RAISED YOU?
IT'S AS THOUGH SOMETHING HAPPENED TO YOU... —WHEN YOU WENT TO AMERICA
I RAISED YOU... ...LIKE YOU WERE MY OWN SON!
JUST WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED ...TO CHANGE YOU SO MUCH?!

CAN'T YOU SEE THE YOUNG MAN SAID NO?
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!
N-NO! I DON'T WANT TO!
NO!
I'M SCARED! I'M SCARED!
NOW, THEN.
COME WITH ME, FLORIAN.
LONG TIME NO SEE, FATHER ISAAC.
YOU BEEN DOING WELL FOR YOURSELF ?
THAT BOY IS A GUEST OF MY HOUSE!
I SUGGEST YOU GET YOUR HANDS OFF OF HIM AND LET ME TAKE HIM HOME

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN GO IN YOUR CONDITION!
IT'S JUST AS I SAID
BUT IT WAS ONLY FOR AN INSTANT, SO I CAN'T SAY FOR SURE.
WHAT ...
WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?!
FLORIAN'S STILL ALIVE?!
I CAN'T JUST SIT HERE!
WE'RE NOT ENTIRELY SURE IT'S FLORIAN.
HE ACTED AS IF HE DIDN'T KNOW ME.
WAIT, RAY.
I'LL GO.
... BRING HIM HERE


THIS IS YOUR LAST WARNING.
MOVE.
STEP AWAY
GRAMPS.
.....!
YOU..
... MONSTER!

...!


.....

BANG

YOU OKAY? YOU'RE SWEATING UP A STORM
MAYBE WE SHOULD GO BACK
HA!
THIS IS NOTHING!
I KNOW THIS NEIGHBORHOOD LIKE THE BACK OF MY HAND!
IT'S BEEN AGES, RAY!
I HEARD YOU'D BEEN ADOPTED INTO A RICH FRENCH FAMILY!
ALI...
YOU MEAN THAT LITTLE RUNT, ALI?
カチーン
Don't include me
WHAT A BUNCH OF STINGY-LOOKING SERVANTS YOU BROUGHT ALONG!
RAY?!
RAY, IS THAT YOU?!
I KNEW IT! IT'S ME, ALI!

Huh?
FLAP
YOU REST HERE.
I'LL GO MAKE SURE!
LET GO OF ME!
I'M GOING TO MAKE SURE OF IT WITH MY OWN TWO EYES!
SHOW ME TO THE PLACE, SOLOMON!
GOOD GRIEF
THERE'S NO STOPPING HIM NOW.

I'M JUST SOME GUY YOUR DEAR GRANDPA USED TO TAKE CARE OF.
NO NEED TO FEEL FRIGHT-ENED... ...LITTLE GIRL.
WH-WHO'S THERE?!
HEY!
LOOK AT THAT!
RAY'S COME BACK!
RAY?
IS THAT RAY?
DON'T GO TALKING LIKE I'M ALREADY DEAD!
HUMPH
YOU LITTLE BRAT!
BONK
HUH?
?!
WHO WOULD'VE GUESSED SUCH A TRAGEDY WOULD BEFALL--
AND HERE I THOUGHT THAT OLD COOT WOULD LAST ANOTHER HUNDRED YEARS.

OUCH!
I...I DON'T KNOW!
WHAT?! WHY WOULD AZURA DO SUCH A THING?!
RUMOR HAS IT
..AZURA'S THE ONE BEHIND IT!
FATHER ISAAC?!
RAY, I ALMOST FORGOT!
FATHER ISAAC HAS BEEN SHOT!
ALL I HEARD WAS THAT..
SOME WESTERNER WAS HANGING AROUND ISAAC'S PLACE WHEN THE TROUBLE STARTED.

HE LEFT A MESSAGE FOR YOU.
HE SAID YOU'D DEFINITELY COME HERE ONCE YOU HEARD THE RUMORS
AND HE ALSO SAID THAT IF YOU WANT THE BOY RETURNED SAFELY...
...YOU'D BETTER COME TO THE RUINS OF HIS MANSION. ALONE
IF NOT...
...HE WON'T BE ABLE TO GUARANTEE THE BOY'S LIFE
カレン CLOMP
YOU'RE ALIVE!
THANK ALLAH!
I WAS SO WORRIED!
HMPH. YOU'RE SO TRANSPARENT.
OW!
NOTHING BUT A BUNCH OF GOOD-FOR-NOTHINGS!
OF ALL THE NERVE!
CURSES TO BOTH YOU AND AZURA!
YES! HIM!
WHERE IS HE NOW?
AZURA TOOK HIM.
BUT THE LAD PUT UP SUCH A FIGHT, I HAD TO INTERVENE AND LOOK WHAT CAME OF IT.
A WESTERNER? HERE?
AAH, YOU MUST MEAN "AMETHYST."

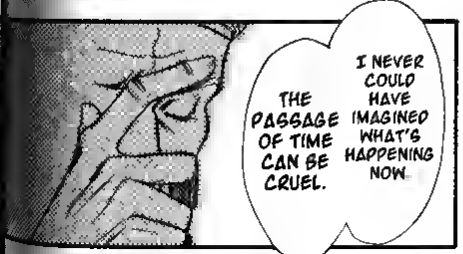
IT MIGHT NOT BE A LOT, BUT...
...IT SHOULD HELP.
MERCI.
TAKE THIS WITH YOU, RAY.
BESIDES, HE'S NOT ABOUT TO LISTEN TO EITHER OF US.
WAIT!
YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT IN YOUR CONDITION!
CLATTER
...
LET HIM DO WHAT HE WANTS...
...LAILA.
OH.

ABSOLUTELY EVER SINCE THEY WERE CHILDREN
HE, AND HIS SICK FRENCH MOTHER LIVED IN THE SLUMS.
DO YOU KNOW ABOUT RAY'S PAST?
AT ONE TIME, THEY USED TO BE THE BEST OF FRIENDS.
SO ...AZURA AND RAY ARE ENEMIES NOW, HUH?
...AFTER SOME TROUBLE, HE FLED TO MOROCCO.
HE SPENT MOST OF HIS LIFE IN ARABIA, BUT...
THEN ...
...HE MET AZURA

YOU MUST HAVE HAD YOUR FILL OF ANXIETY THESE PAST FEW DAYS.
BUT DON'T WORRY.
I'M SURE HE'LL... BE ALL RIGHT.
THE GUY'S GOT THE DEVIL'S LUCK.
!

WHERE ARE YOU?!
NOW SHOW YOURSELF!
AZURA!
I CAME, JUST AS YOU WANTED!
AZURA!
COME OUT HERE!

PERHAPS IT WAS THE FACT THAT THEY WERE BOTH OUTCASTS NO MATTER WHERE THEY WENT.
THAT'S WHY THEIR FRIENDSHIP WAS THE STRONGEST
BACK THEN, RAY WAS DISCRIMINATED AGAINST FOR BEING A MIX OF ARABIC AND FRENCH.
AND AZURA WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO GAVE HIM HOPE!
HE WAS A KIND-HEARTED BOY, LOVED BY HIS PEERS
HE ACCEPTED EVERYONE, NO MATTER WHAT RACE THEY WERE, AND SO RECEIVED THEIR ADORATION AND RESPECT.


I NEVER COULD HAVE IMAGINED WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW.
THE PASSAGE OF TIME CAN BE CRUEL.

THERE YOU ARE!
HA HA...
CALM YOURSELF.
WHY, YOU--
HOW VERY AMUSING!
!

WHY YOU...
...BASTARD!
...!!
YOU REALLY ARE...
...SO MUCH FUN TO TEASE...
tee hee

!
.....
FOOLISH AS ALWAYS...
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

AN EVER-LASTING ...
... REPULSIVE SCAR.
I THINK I'LL ...
...BURN MY BRAND RIGHT INTO HIS PRETTY WHITE SKIN.
PER-HAPS ON BOTH HIS ARMS
OR MAYBE EVEN HIS CHEST NO, HOW ABOUT HIS FACE?
TURN HIM INTO SOMETHING YOU'D NEVER WANT TO LAY EYES ON AGAIN.
WHAT ARE YOU... .. DOING, AZURA?

TSK, TSK.
NOW IT'S TOO LATE
DROP THE GUN.
?!
DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS?
THAT'S RIGHT.
AS YOU CAN SEE, IT'S A HOT IRON.

I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN...
DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.
...OUR PROMISE.
I KNOW YOU PRIZE BEAUTIFUL THINGS MORE THAN THE AVERAGE MAN.
YOU SIMPLY CAN'T STAND THE SIGHT OF SEEING SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL BEING DESTROYED.
FLORIAN BELONGS TO ME!
TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF HIM!
DROP THE DRAMATICS, RAY.
I'M WILLING TO MAKE A DEAL WITH YOU. COME WITH ME LIKE A GOOD BOY, AND FLORIAN GOES FREE.
YOU ALREADY BROKE ONE OF OUR PROMISES, SO I COULDN'T HELP BUT GET A LITTLE ROUGH.
ヒク…
…!

GOOD-BYE
IT'S A PROM-IGE
PROMISE ME YOU'LL...
..LET HIM GO SAFELY BACK TO THE OTHERS.
FOR GOOO-NESS SAKE
YOU COULD AT LEAST BUTTON YOUR OWN SHIRT UP.
You're not a kid anymore, right?
NOW YOU'RE ACTING MORE OBEDIENT.
.....

Ha ha ha
SO, WHAT IS IT?
What's with you?
I JUST ..CAME UP WITH A GREAT IDEA.
WHAT GIVES?
DON'T GO CALLING ME AROUND LIKE A DOG!
RAY ...
...COME TO ME.
?!
I HAVE DECIDED ...
...TO BRAND YOU WITH MY MARK OF OWNERSHIP.
JUST LIKE THE SLAVES OF OLD.
WHAT ?!

I DON'T CARE IF IT WAS ONE ARM OR TWO!
IT WON'T INTERFERE WITH MY PRAYING!
DON'T OVERDO IT, GRAMPS
YOU TOOK A BULLET IN THAT ARM, REMEMBER?
I... I'M GOING TO GO CHECK ON HIM.
I'LL GO, TOO.
NO.
YOU DRAW TOO MUCH ATTENTION STAY HERE
I'LL LEAVE THE REST TO YOU
STAY HERE IN CASE HE RETURNS

HE'S BEEN GONE TOO LONG
EXCUSE ME
YOU'RE IN THE WAY OF MY EVENING PRAYER.
IT ISN'T LIKE HIM TO BE LATE!
SOMETHING MUST'VE HAPPENED!

ARRGH!
!
...I'VE DROPPED THE IRON
SEE WHAT YOU'VE DONE?
THANKS TO ALL YOUR STRUGGLING

HE'LL COME BACK
HE'S A STRONG LAD.
LAILA!
WHAT GOOD WILL MAKING A FUSS BRING?
EVERY THING IS AS ALLAH PLANS

...
GRAMPS

WH-WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?
SUDDENLY POKING ME WITH THAT THING!
SIZZLE
GRRR
I NEVER AGREED ...
...TO BE BRANDED YET!
BUT...
...YOU SWORE YOU BELONGED TO ME, CORRECT?
THEN WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL...
...ABOUT A LITTLE BRAND?
I MUST STRIP YOU OF YOUR SELF-CONCEIT AND DECEITFULNESS AS A HUMAN.
THAT'S ALL THIS IS FOR.
THE TRAIN-ING
...STARTS WITH THIS.
I COULD USE ODIUM, JUST LIKE I DID WITH FLORIAN, AND MOLD YOU INTO A PERFECTLY OBEDIENT DOLL.
BUT THEN, YOU'D BE WORTH-LESS TO ME.
JUST WHAT DID...
...YOU DO TO FLORIAN?
YOU MEAN ...
...YOU DIDN'T REALIZE?

DON'T MAKE ME STRIKE YOU AGAIN.
I DON'T WANT TO DESTROY YOU.
ARGH!
MMPH!
REALIZE THE TRUTH, NOIR!
YOU ARE POWER-LESS!

DAMN YOU
...TO HELL!

BANG!
SOMEHOW!
?!
WHAT THE--? A GUNSHOT!
A...
AZU...
RA...
UPH!
DEAR GOD, PLEASE!
PLEASE, LET THEM BE ALIVE!
NOIR!
FLORIAN!

BANG
AZURA !
GAH!
URGH
YOU ...
BRAT !
BANG

BANG
FLORIAN ...!

AAAH!
AAAAH!
WHA...
AH...
TWANG
TWANG
WHOA!
FLORIAN!
THAT'S ENOUGH! PUT THE GUN DOWN!
-ZA-ROFF

DON'T WORRY.
YOU'RE SAFE NOW
YOU DID THE RIGHT THING
YOU SAVED MY LIFE.
YOU DID...
...THE RIGHT THING

!
NOIR !
FLORIAN? WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?
THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE ALIVE!
WHY WOULDN'T I BE?
It looks more than that to finish ME off!
PERFECT TIMING LEND ME A HAND
...
SO THOSE GUNSHOTS BEFORE WERE --
HE'S THE ONE WHO SET ME FREE.
I GUESS I COULDN'T BREAK IT OFF BY MYSELF.
MY CHAIN TO THE PAST.

...HAVE THE PAST CATCH UP WITH ME AGAIN...
NOW I'LL NEVER...
IT'S NOTHING
LET'S GO
LOOKS LIKE I OWE HIM ONE NOW.
NOIR?
Let's tell that to Florian when he wakes up
He's heavier than he looks
WHAT'S THAT STUPID GRIN ON YOUR FACE ABOUT?
TAKE HIS OTHER SHOULDER FOR ME.

A 38 CALIBRE
NO WONDER IT WAS SO WEAK.
IT'S NOT EVEN ENOUGH TO BREAK THROUGH BONE.
KEH
I WAS HIT TWO OR THREE TIMES
WAIT, FOUR
HAH
NOT EXACTLY A GOOD PERCENTAGE CONSIDERING THE AMOUNT OF SHOTS FIRED.

THIS TIME, AT LEAST...

...THEY'VE MANAGED TO HUMILIATE ME.

BUT YOU, RAY, YOU'RE TOO SOFT!

YOU DIDN'T EVEN CHECK TO MAKE SURE I WAS DEAD.

AND I'LL MAKE YOU REGRET THAT SO MUCH YOU'LL WISH YOU WERE DEAD!

WISH YOU WERE DEAD!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH FLORIAN!
HE'S ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THAT.
DON'T MOVE! YOU HAVE TO LET YOUR WOUNDS HEAL!
I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT!
HE DOES-N'T KNOW
...ANYONE, LET ALONE HIMSELF.
IT--IT CAN'T BE!

HEY, LOOK AT ME.
...
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU, DAMMIT!
SAY ... SOME-THING.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND A DAMN WORD I'M SAYING ?!

HOW COULD THAT HAPPEN ?!
JUST EARLIER, HE SAVED MY LIFE!
THAT MAY HAVE BEEN ANOTHER ONE OF THE REASONS.
THE SHOCK OF SHOOTING SOMEONE MAY HAVE PUSHED HIM TO RETREAT FURTHER INTO HIS SHELL
.....!
RAY!

POW
I SAID, CALM DOWN!
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING ?!
HE'S INJURED !
RAY!
YOU MONSTER !
SORRY! COULDN'T HELP IT!
THUD

RAY, STOP IT!
TUG
FLORIAN!
LET ME GO!
I'M GOING TO SNAP THAT BRAT OUT OF IT!
LET GO!
SHARE

DAMM-
IT!
NOIR...
DON'T RUSH THINGS.
NOTHING COMES FROM ACTING RASH.
!
SLAM
...!
DAMM IT!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
DON'T TOUCH ME!

?!
WH-WHAT'S THE MATTER, LAILA?
NO!--
RAY!
.....
THANK GOOD-NESS. YOU'RE STILL CON-SCIOUS

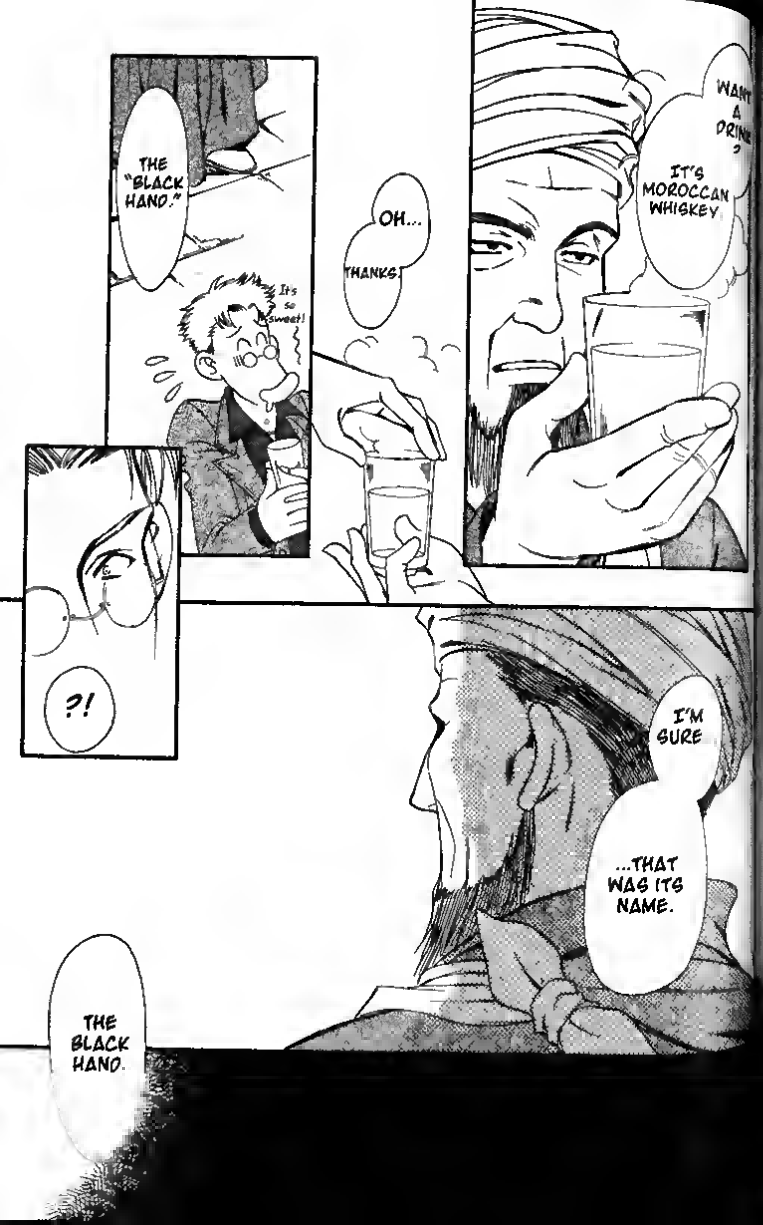
ONCE HE'S FOUND THE ANSWER INSIDE HIMSELF.
HE'LL COME BACK TO HIS OLD SELF AGAIN.
?!
YOU WERE THE SAME WAY TOO, RIGHT, RAY?
ALL YOU CAN DO...
...IS BELIEVE IN HIM.
MUMBLE MUMBLE
YOUR WOUNDS WERE WORSE THAN I THOUGHT.
YOUR CLOTHES MELTED RIGHT INTO THE BURNS.
AND WE HAVE TO REDO THE BAND-AGES.

THE LOST TREASURE OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR!
...AZURA WAS SO BENT ON GETTING HIS HANDS ON
AND I'D LIKE TO FIND FOR MYSELF...
...JUST WHAT SORT OF TREASURE ...
THE LONGER WE STAY HERE, THE MORE TROUBLE WE CAUSE YOU.
THINGS AREN'T GOING TO BE ANY SAFER FOR US JUST BECAUSE AZURA'S DEAD.
YOU'RE GOING TO TUNISIA
WHY THE SUDDEN DECISION?

I'M NOT THAT WEAK.
QUIT WITH THE TEARS. THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
OW!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BEAR YOUR PAIN ALONE.
SO, PLEASE DON'T MAKE THAT FACE ANYMORE!
I WAS JUST AFRAID... I'D LOSE YOU, TOO.

OF COURSE I WILL, I DON'T NEED YOU TELLING ME THAT.
HMPH
THAT BOY'S GROWN UP TO BE A FINE MAN
GUESS IT MEANS I'VE AGED SOME, TOO.
HE MUST'VE BEEN QUITE A HANDFUL AS A KID.
THAT'S TRUE
?!
AREN'T YOU GOING WITH THEM?

UH, SORRY TO BREAK IT TO YOU, BUT I DON'T EXACTLY HAVE THE MEANS TO TAKE YOU TO TUNISIA.
TELL ME SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW. BUT DON'T WORRY. I'M NOT ABOUT TO PUSH A POOR DETECTIVE LIKE YOURSELF ANY FURTHER THAN I HAVE TO.
MAY YOU LIVE LONG.
ISAAC.
THANKS FOR EVERY-THING.
IT'S A HAND-SHAKE!
A HAND-SHAKE!
WHAT? NOW YOU WANT MONEY?

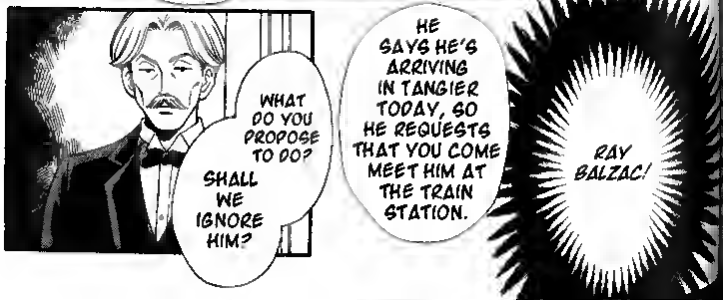

THE "BLACK HAND."
It's so sweet!
OH... THANKS.
WANT A DRINK?
IT'S MOROCCAN WHISKEY
?!
I'M SURE
...THAT WAS ITS NAME.
THE BLACK HAND.

I'M HERE ON A DIFFERENT CASE.
I THOUGHT I'D FIND OUT A BIT MORE ABOUT AZURA
ABOUT AZURA?
THERE'S A RUMOR HE'S INVOLVED IN A POWERFUL ORGANIZATION.
I WANT TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT IT.
WHAT WILL THAT ACCOMPLISH?
HE'S ALREADY DEAD, ISN'T HE?
AZURA WAS INVOLVED IN THAT ORGANIZATION SOMEHOW.
I CAN'T JUST OVERLOOK THAT NOW.
THAT ORGANIZATION MURDERED...
...MY LITTLE SISTER... AND FRIEND.
AND I WANT TO KNOW THE REASON WHY...
...THEY WERE KILLED.

Tangier

AH, MATISSE'S NEWEST WORK, "MOROCCAN WOMAN."
HA-!
THIS PERFECT HUE, PERFECT COMPOSITION... JUST MARVELOUS!
IT'S LIKE IT WAS ORN JUST TO BE WNED BY ME.

LORD MICHEL. A TELEGRAM HAS ARRIVED FOR YOU.
TELE-GRAM ?
FROM WHO?
ONLY THOSE CHOSEN WITH THE BLESSED AESTHETIC SENSE..
.. CAN SEE THE VALUE OF TRUE BEAUTY
MUCH LIKE MYSELF, IF I DO SAY SO.
...COUNT RAY BALZAC DU COURLAND.
YES
IT APPEARS TO BE FROM...


WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE TO DO? SHALL WE IGNORE HIM?
HE SAYS HE'S ARRIVING IN TANGIER TODAY, SO HE REQUESTS THAT YOU COME MEET HIM AT THE TRAIN STATION.
RAY BALZAC!

NO!
--
HUH?!
THERE-HE IS! JUST AHEAD!
WHOA!

CLICK
NO.
GO RETRIEVE HIM.
AND TAKE OUR BEST ROLLS ROYCE!
LET'S SHOW HIM MY GENEROSITY.

NOIR!
NOIR!
DARN IT!
I GOT SEPARATED! WHAT A CROWD!
I HAVE TO GET TO THE EXIT!
...
OH!

VISCOUNT MICHEL RAUL DU COURLAND
MY COUSIN
MY, IT'S BEEN AGES!
RAY BALZAC, IT'S AN HONOR TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
THEN WHY DON'T YOU LOOK AT ME?
IT'S RUDE!
I'M HAPPY TO SEE YOU TOO, MICHEL
Would you drop the face and flashy clothes?
But he's so weird...
HE LOOKS JUST LIKE NOIR!
LIKE THE "WHITE" VERSION OF NOIR!
Talk about flashy Sheesh it's even painted gold
I SEE.
YOU MUST BE COUNT RAY BALZAC OU COURLAND
I'M HERE TO ESCORT YOU TO THE MANSION
COUSIN? WHAT COUSIN?
YOU MEAN THE ONE THAT WORKS IN THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY, AND SENT EVERYONE ELSE OFF TO PARIS?
THAT'S THE ONE
Damn, this car is embarrassing
Wow what an odd car
WAI ~~
NOIR, WAIT!
WHAT'S THE HOLD-UP, LAILA? LET'S GET MOVING

I BELIEVE OUR FAMILY'S MOTTO WAS...
...A FAVOR GRANTED TO THE GREAT COURLAND HOUSE WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN
I THINK YOU'VE HAD YOUR FAIR SHARE OF THAT FROM ME
HUH, MICHEL?
HMPH
NO DOUBT, YOU'RE UP TO NO GOOD.
AND YOU'RE A DISGRACE TO THE FAMILY, FOR WORKING AS A MEASLY LOAN SHARK!
WELL..
THE USUAL, I SUPPOSE
NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT, RIGHT?
YOU LOOK AN ABSOLUTE MESS!
AND USING YOUR RING AS COLLATERAL TO MAKE ME SEND A SHIP?
JUST WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN GETTING YOURSELF INTO LATELY?
YOU HOOLI-GAN, YOU!
JUST WHAT...
...DO YOU PLAN ON MAKING ME DO?
?!
SIMPLE.
ALL I ASK IS THAT YOU SEND ME AND MY COMPANIONS ON A LITTLE TRIP TO TUNISIA.
BUT THAT WAS--
I'VE ALREADY PAID YOU BACK FOR THAT!
OH YEAH? AND JUST WHO WAS IT THAT RAISED ALL THOSE WAR FUNDS?
THEY USED TO CALL YOU A PRODIGY, YOU KNOW! AND NOW YOU'VE GONE AND GOTTEN ALL FULL OF YOURSELF!
YOU MAY HAVE GRADUATED THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS AT THE TOP OF YOUR CLASS, BUT NOW YOU RUN AROUND LIKE SOME BASTARD CHILD!
AND ON TOP OF THAT
EVEN THOUGH YOU'VE DIGRESSED INTO THE DIRTY PROFESSION OF A LOAN SHARK...
...YOU STILL THINK YOURSELF TO BE HIGHER THAN ME! UTTERLY HUMILIATING!
Shudder

WHAT SMOLDERING AMETHYST EYES...
HE'S NOT FEELING WELL
I JUST WANTED TO LET HIM REST
STOP JUMPING TO YOUR OWN CONCLUSION!
I SEE YOUR LITTLE PLOT NOW! YOU'VE GONE INTO TRAFFICKING HUMANS!
HAVE YOU REALLY FALLEN THAT FAR? YOU'RE A DISGRACE TO THE FAMILY!
SILENCE!
STOP! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
OH YEAH? THEN LET'S JUST SEE WHAT'S UNDER THIS MYSTERIOUS MAN'S HOOD!
YOU'RE NOT TRYING TO GET ME INVOLVED IN ONE OF YOUR WICKED SCHEMES, ARE YOU?
WHY, OF COURSE NOT! I'M NOT ASKING FOR MUCH.

AND BEING THAT HE'S THE SON OF THE ROCHEFORT FAMILY..
...HE'S BECOME WEAK DUE TO HIS SHELTERED UPBRINGING.
DON'T YOU THINK YOU'D LIKE TO GIVE HIM A HELPING HAND, MICHEL? AFTER ALL, HE'S A DISTANT RELATIVE OF OURS
THE ROCHEFORT? YOU MEAN THE GRAND ARISTOCRATIC FAMILY?!
IS THAT...
..REALLY TRUE, RAY?
YES.
HIS NAME IS FLORIAN DU ROCHEFORT.
THE ONE REMAINING SON OF THE MARQUIS FAMILY, WITH TIES TO THE FRENCH COURT
IN ORDER TO WIN OVER MICHEL'S FAVOR, NOIR PURPOSEFULLY EXAGGERATING FLORIAN'S ARISTOCRATIC RANK
EVEN THOUGH HE HATES THE THOUGHT OF JUDGING SOMEONE PURELY ON THEIR FAMILY HISTORY!
HOW VERY VERY SAID, NOIR
VERY WELL THEN LEAVE IT TO ME.
I'LL MAKE ALL THE PREPARATIONS MYSELF
You're giving me the creeps
AND ALL FOR..
...THOSE BEAUTIFUL AMETHYST EYES.
Heh!
Sounds just like him!
He really IS Noir's cousin!
Oh, shoot it I'm not THAT stupid am I?

SHE-ESH.
YOU SURE ARE A HANDFUL.
COME ON
GIVE ME YOUR OTHER FOOT NOW.
LAILA?
HUH?
SHE'S GONE

OH WOW! ♡
WHAT A GORGEOUS CRUISE SHIP!
A PACKAGE HAS ARRIVED FROM LORD MICHEL.
HE WISHES YOU TO ATTEND TONIGHT'S BALL WEARING THEM.
THESE CLOTHES ARE THE LATEST FASHION!
AMAZING! ♡
SAYS HERE HE CAN'T STAND SEEING US DRESSED IN SUCH DRAB ANY LONGER.

WE'LL SEE.
WHAT'S WITH THIS GUY?
UH...
YOU ONLY SENT US MEN'S SUITS.
CAN'T MAKE YOUR MASTER WAIT, NOW CAN WE?
ANYWAY, THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME UNTIL THE DINNER PARTY YOU BEST GET CHANGED NOW.
FLORIAN'LL BE FINE WITH RAY LOOKING AFTER HIM.
THERE'S NO PLACE FOR YOU.
OH MY...
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
I GET IT NOW!
YOU'RE A GIRL, HUH?
HOW ABSOLUTELY RUDE OF ME!
TALK ABOUT A JERK!

EVER SINCE FLORIAN GOT LIKE THAT, NOIR HASN'T LEFT HIS SIDE FOR AN INSTANT!
IF I HADN'T LEFT...
...IT'D BEEN TOO AWKWARD.
YOU THERE, WHY HAVEN'T YOU CHANGED?
I PREPARED AN OUTFIT FOR YOU AS WELL, DIDN'T I?
MICHEL...
WH-WHY--
OH, I'VE DECIDED TO JOIN YOU ON YOUR TRIP.
I'D BE TOO WORRIED FOR THE ROCHEFORT BOY IF HE WERE LEFT TO RAY BALZAC'S CARE ALONE
BESIDES, IT'S ABOUT TIME I TOOK A VACATION

I HEARD HIS FATHER WAS AN ARAB!
WHAT A DISGRACE!
JUST LOOK!
IT'S THAT AWFUL LOAN-SHARK BUFFOON!
DID YOU SEE HIM THERE?
IT'S COUNT COURLAND, NO?
GOOD GRACIOUS
THAT'S WHY HIS MOTHER WAS BANISHED FROM THE COURLAND FAMILY!
SO THEN, JUST HOW DID HE WIND UP AS A COUNT?
WAIT!
What do I care?
AS A SHOW OF MY APOLOGIES
... I'D LIKE TO OFFER YOU A GORGEOUS DRESS TO WEAR.
I KNOW ONE THAT WILL LOOK STUNNING ON YOU!
I DON'T NEED IT!
IT'S EASIER TO MOVE AROUND IN THESE CLOTHES ANYWAY!
LET GO OF ME!

NO USE, HUH?
HERE, HOLD ON TO ME.
SO, RAY BALZAC, ARE YOU ENJOYING YOURSELF?
SURE.
THESE PEOPLE ARE HORRIBLE....
I'd rather be stuck with needles
GIGGLE GIGGLE
Whisper Whisper
SORRY FOR THE WAIT.
LET'S GO.
I'VE BEEN HERE LONG ENOUGH. I'M GOING BACK TO OUR ROOM.
FINE BY ME. AS LONG AS YOU'VE LEARNED YOUR PLACE.
BUT DON'T FEEL TOO DISCOURAGED. GOSSIP IS THE OIL THAT TURNS THE GEARS OF HIGH SOCIETY.

THIS IS THE SECOND TIME I'VE HELD YOU LIKE THIS.
SHEESH
YOU SURE ARE LOT OF TROUBLE.
NO, RAY! DON'T PUSH YOURSELF!
YOUR WOUNDS STILL HAVEN'T FULLY HEALED!
.....
CLATTER

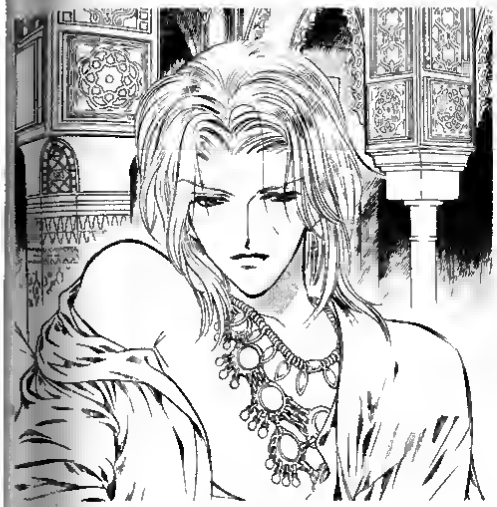
DRAGGING RAY OUT HERE LIKE A SPECTACLE!
WHY DO YOU THINK A PROUD MAN LIKE HIM WOULD PUT UP WITH IT WITHOUT SAYING A WORD?!
WHAT DO
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ANYTHING?!
?!
I MAY NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT NOBILITY, BUT...
...I KNOW THAT YOU'RE NOTHING BUT SCUM!
NOIR'S TRYING TO MAKE UP FOR EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED!
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO FLORIAN AND AZURA!

UGH, WHAT A DISGUSTING SCENE...
IS THAT PERFORMANCE TRYING TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE IT WAS MY FAULT FOR FORCING THEM TO ATTEND TONIGHT'S BALL?
EEK!
LORD MICHEL!
HOLD THAT ANIMAL BACK!
SLAP

I KNOW YOU'LL LOVE IT
THE WHITE CHALK WALLS ..
..AND BLUE OCEAN
IT GOES ON FOREVER.
!

WHA..?
WAIT A--
BAM!
ARE YOU ... GETTING TIRED ?
ALMOST FORGOT THAT YOU GET SEASICK.
BUT BY THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, WE'LL BE IN TUNISIA
IT'S SAID TO BE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PLACE IN ALL OF MAGHREB.
AND ITS MAZE OF RUINS FROM ANCIENT ROME ARE A MAGNIFICENT SIGHT.

WHO'S THERE ?
TELL ME, OLD MAN ...
WHERE DID RAY GO?
IT GOES ON
THIS [illegible] SKY...



post script

Thank you very much for picking up this book.

I've really stretched out the Maghreb arc, but thanks for staying with us until the end.

I feel it's obvious how my passion for the characters is showing more and more, but when it comes to the story's main character, Noir, it's more of an extension of myself in a way. (I don't smoke cigars, though.) He's sort of like the ideal man I imagine with all the good points.

It's actually quite rare for me to come up with a character that makes me happy just drawing him.

I wasn't being sadistic or anything, but this volume's story was certainly cruel to Noir-kun. But because he's such a strong and positive character, all the dark and gloomy atmosphere doesn't seem to crush him.

I feel like the story is flowing on without any of my intentions in mind, so as to where this story is going to go, I plan on just continuing to ride the wave and enjoy it.

The Maghreb arc is also reaching its climax, and the next volume should finally wrap up the story all together. With Comic Eyes magazine on hiatus, there may be some delays, but I hope to release the next volume come spring of 2002.

I hope everything works out well with that.
Things haven't been going as well as they could be but I can't just pity myself all day. I'm always finding some way to escape, and end up doing just whatever I want, rather than NEED to do.

If you work hard enough, what you want will come true someday. The only hard part is trying to figure out how to maintain that mindset.

Sometimes, in order to keep my aspirations strong, I try working hard while munching on my favorite food, beef fillet.

Should I be worried about Mad Cow disease?

And now I'd like to take the time to acknowledge my great assistants that help me through the creation of this book. Naoko Nakatsuji-san, Izumi Hijiri-san, Miyakoshi Wagusa-san, Hondou Makoto-san, Kazuki Mari-san, Fuyutsuki Mitsuru-san, Iwahashi Mikiko-san, Wakimura Yasuko-san, Mizutani Fuka-san, and my chief assistant, Oda Ryoka. I'm so sorry for making you endure the many trials I put you through. Thank you once again. Seriously!

Also, my manager, Ohara-sama. Thank you so much for all the wonderful catch copies. Even now, I can't express my gratitude.

And of course, thank you, all of my wonderful readers who are now reading this book! I hope I didn't let any of you down! And please feel free to send me any feedback you have.

I hope to see you all again in the next volume.

2001.11 Higuri You

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Created by You Higuri

Translation by Katherine Schilling

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